243 days and then let in a gentle amount of water to flood the beds—one or two inches now, and more and more as the plants grew taller. In the meantime, vast stretches of beds were being prepared in the same way—plough and harrow and chop the weeds which here had become bigger and rougher with the rains, but would feed the soil better for that reason. When they had finished, all the country-side along the railway line looked like a vast segmented mirror, all the fine mud of the field lying beneath the four inches of water, and not a green weed to be seen. By now the plants in the nursery beds were about 1½—2 feet tall, and it was mid-July. Men plucked the seedlings, tying them swiftly into bundles of about 750. They chopped off the heads to free the plant of leaves which might make the young stalks topple over when they were planted upright. Then men and women stood ankle deep in the main beds and with one deft stroke of the right-hand they planted two or four stalks straight into the soft mud, each group a few inches from the next. It was this long and laborious task which gave the Lower Burman his landscape of endless green fields of rich waving paddy. From now on, these fields had only to be tended with water, neither to be stagnant, flooded, nor too dry. Through the months of September and October the rains diminished, the soil grew drier and the corn ripened from green to yellow. In December it was cut, tied in bundles and sunned for further drying and carried to the threshing floor. Here the bundles were ranged in rows with ears turned inwards, on the hardened surface of mud and dung, and bullocks trod round and round on them, slow and confident that their heavy hoofs would crush the chaff and leave the hard grain whole; and lol when the mixture of corn and chaff was handed up in baskets to a high platform and tumbled down in a strong wind, the wind blew the chaff and dust away, but the corn fell in a clean heap on the ground below. Thus cultivators, and the weeds, earth, rain, sun, oxen and wind produced our wun-ga; but alas, the bounding broadcast sower, the slim, red-skirted deft-handed transplanters and the loving water-layers of this description are too often merely tenants or hired workers on the land. Owing to various causes, about 48% of the
423 land in Lower Burma belongs to non-agriculturists, chiefly non-resident, and although the money-lending alien and Indian Chettiar had become the chief holders of such lands, the owners of fields among our friends were also absentee landlords in the fullest sense, having little connection with the working of the paddy, except as a source of income.

452 Some of the pensioners got a fat income from money-lending although they would not have liked to admit it. Burmans who need money do not borrow from banks, nor do they have dealings with banks as a rule. It is only in this generation that such a thing as a bank balance is

becoming common. Borrowing money is always such a shameful thing to Burmans that highly usurious rates prevail. The minimum rate of these private money-lenders is Re. 1/8 per Rs. 100/- per month, *i.e.* 18% per annum.

But this emphasis on money-making during the retirement period was not pure avariciousness. It was connected with the ability to discharge the duties of a parent and a good Buddhist during one's last years, to have sufficient means to settle children in a good marriage, which is one of the duties laid down for a good parent, and to make many donations towards pagodas, resthouses and monasteries, all as a foundation for a rebirth into a better existence.

For men like my father, this last period of their lives was a soft and gentle immersion in the atmosphere which pervaded their childhood in the monastery, and which had been banished into a memory with the years of English education, government posts, courts and litigation, and the rearing of children whose future must be bound up with the obtaining of better government posts.

During these years, my father continued his daily prayers before the altar, but they were short and he said them softly, his feet were shod with shoes and socks, his tourings took him to headmen's houses more often than to monasteries, his evenings were spent in playing tennis instead of chinlon, and drinking lime-juice instead of coconut water, and his houses of the regulation pattern were filled with cane furniture made by convicts in jails. What a far cry from the dim light on wooden floors and pillars, the steady chorus of young monks at prayers. My father, who during his working years had encouraged us to eat, laugh and be merry in each present moment, now dismayed us with a sudden conviction of the vanity of all worldly things, towns, society, dress and ornament. We woke up at dawn to the sound of his prayers, and on most mornings he walked out of the town to the hills where the monasteries and resthouses were gathered; he walked barefoot again with great enjoyment in those quiet grounds, turned aside to supervise the building of a *thein*, a house for the ordination and meditation of monks, which he had persuaded a more wealthy friend to endow. He no longer showered on us de luxe editions of Western encyclopaedias and the collected works of Dickens and Scott as he used to, but bought richly carved book cases and sacred books for the monasteries in Thaton. We no longer ate our meals on chairs, sitting up at a table, but at a low round table on the polished floor. My father sat cross legged, but he could not go back to eating with his fingers, he still used a spoon and fork. At nights we fell asleep to the sound of his prayers and it was like a benediction. Buddhist prayers in Burma consist of two parts: the first is a

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243 much preparing. It is simply a portion of the field swept clean. It is sufficiently hard from the broiling sun, and a stake is driven into the centre of the circle. Two lines of sheaves are arranged round this, head to head, and the grain is trodden out by slow-moving bullocks in good old lazy fashion. The Christian Biblical precept, not to muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn, does not fail of observance with the Buddhist farmer. Then the paddy, that is, the unhusked grain, is winnowed. In some places hand-winnowing machines of a simple pattern are used; but ordinarily a far more primitive and easy method, corresponding to the substitution of oxen for threshing-flails, is in use. A man stands on an elevated platform and capsizes baskets of paddy brought from the threshing-floor; the rice falls on a sloping bamboo mat and so to the ground, the wind blowing away a great part of the bits of broken straw, chaff, and light grain. The system may not be very thorough, but it saves an immense amount of trouble, which is the chief consideration. All that now remains to be done is to carry the grain off to the big rice-boat lying in the creek. There it is stowed in bulk; and after a day or two, the farmer makes a start, dropping leisurely down through the network of creeks into one of the main streams, and so making his way to Rangoon, or Bassein, whence he will return in a few weeks with fine Chinese neckerchiefs for his daughters and perhaps a gay Manchester paso or two for himself and his sons—unless, indeed, the Madras money-lender has snapped up all his receipts down in town, or some of the robber-boats that infest the creeks at this time of the year have pounced upon him and carried off everything but the boat and the paddles.

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243 427 433 435 Rice-farming would be profitable as well as easy work were it not for the reckless squandering of almost all the cultivators. The average rent per acre is under three shillings; the average produce of the land per acre is from eighty to a hundred bushels in the more fertile parts, while elsewhere the yield is from forty to fifty. The selling price of rice per maund (80 lbs.) in Rangoon is between 4s. 6d. and 5s. Agriculturists, therefore, ought to grow rich. But they are too fond of gambling and building works of merit

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establishment up to its full strength. And so prices rose and rose until they became absurdly high, and no one profited but the hawks that preyed on the simple Burmese cultivators. Then the English merchants held a meeting, and all pledged themselves not to give more than the current market rate for paddy. This seemed a fair enough agreement; but after a while it was found that the boats all gravitated towards one or two firms. A little investigation showed that this was due to the fact that though they paid the ordinary rate, according to the compact, they had a smaller measuring basket than their neighbours. Accordingly every one went on reducing the size of his basket until the system became as ruinously absurd as ever it had been before. Then there was another meeting, at which it was unanimously agreed that this state of affairs would never do, and that it was absolutely necessary to come to some definite understanding. A committee was appointed which, after some deliberation, concluded that, if, in addition to abiding by the market rate, every one were bound to use a basket of a certain fixed size, there would be no chance for unfair speculations. A standard basket was therefore fixed upon; and the competitors were supposed to start fair again. But in no very long time, one firm put a false bottom in the basket, another wedged in a board; and so on, till matters got back to the old way. This state of affairs is hardly creditable to mercantile honour, and it certainly is by no means profitable.

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Independently of this, paddy has gone up in price at an alarming rate of late years. The first heavy rise was in 1877, at the time of the Madras famine. That was also the time of the resolution to have a standard basket. Rice was wanted in any quantity for the famine districts, and millers gave an altogether fabulous price for grain. The game went on merrily, introduced the scandalous "paddy morality," and lasted long enough to make the cultivators think the new prices had come in for good. Far too many Burmese farmers are heavily in debt to the "chetties," the money-lending caste of the Madras coast. The agriculturists have borrowed money to build a pagoda or a monastery; to give a grand feast on the

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occasion of their marriage, or their father's death; to buy a new yoke of oxen in the place of those that have been carried off by disease; to get seed-grain to sow their tracts of paddy land, the last season's gains having been lost in some gambling transaction when they were down in Rangoon. They have got into the chetty's books in some way at any rate; and hapless is the man, Burman or Englishman, who has dealings with the fat, shaven-headed Madras money-lender. He will be charged eight, ten, twelve per cent a month, or even more, before there is an end of the transaction. The chetties, therefore, took a particular interest in the rise of the price of paddy. High prices ensured their being paid; moreover, handling such unwonted sums of money made the ever-careless Burman reckless. He gambled, he gave great feasts, he got deeper and deeper into debt with the money-lenders. Consequently it was desirable that the prices should not go down; and as men of business the chetties understood how that was to be done; they made the Burman farmers hold back their grain. The Rangoon firms were in desperation to meet their contracts, the ships could not be kept waiting; and so prices were maintained at nearly famine rates. This more than anything else brought about the unlucky legerdemain with standard baskets. The appearance of the chetty element in the trade upset everything. They are charming men of business, and know all about bulling and bearing, and all the other civilised expedients of trade. Poor "Jack Burma," listless and good-natured as he is, would never have thought of such things of himself; but he is in the hands of his master. Not a single village in the jungle, however remote, is to be found without its bare-backed money-lender. He hovers round the paddy nursery; he watches the men planting out the handfuls of half-grown rice; he makes the farmer hold back the threshed-out grain till he gives the word: then he fixes the rate and all but takes the money himself.

The English merchants have struggled against the system, but with small success. They have laid out heavy sums in advances. The farmer is paid for the next year's crop before ever it is sown. This is generally only practi-

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cable with men who have not yet fallen into the clutches of the chetties, and the result has been almost invariably to drive them into the money-lender's arms. The Burmese, it it is to be feared, have not sufficient stability of character. U Myaing or Maung Po never had so much money before in their lives as the advances figure to. They do not know the value of it, and proceed to squander the rupees forthwith; and so, long before the paddy is delivered they are heavily in the usurer's books, and then Maung Po and U Myaing have to do as they are bidden. Moreover, the system in any case could hardly be a safe one. The cultivator might die; there might be a flood or a jungle fire; many things might happen, in fact, to prevent the advance boats from ever reaching the Puzundaung creek. Consequently many English firms have given up the practice, and instead send agents away up the creeks, far into the jungle, to negotiate with the farmers on the spot and try to secure paddy before rivalry has had time to raise the price. But even this expedient does not answer well. The chetties do their best to throw obstacles in the way. It is not without expense, and it impresses the cultivators with a notion of the great demand there is for paddy.

The telegraph, they say, ruins business. The paddy season opens in February with a price of, say between seventy and eighty rupees a hundred baskets. The merchants declare they will not be forced into materially increasing this rate, and the home firms charter a number of ships. Meanwhile the price of paddy steadily rises, while rice in England steadily goes down; and by the time the vessels discharge their cargo in Liverpool or London, milled rice is not very much dearer in wholesale shops than the raw paddy in the Burmese boats. New mills are constantly being started—which would seem contradictory, were it not that all the firms starting them have business of another kind; teak sawmills, cotton or piece-goods trade, silks for Burmese men and maidens, or jute and grey shirtings for Upper Burma and the hill tribes. Rice will certainly always be wanted, and there is any quantity of it to be had in Burma. A little more of the sterling probity which used to be associated with the name of the English merchant would

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do no harm in Rangoon rice dealings, and would win that respect from the farmer which heavy payments and cunning never will.

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Rangoon still continues to be the largest rice port in the world. From January to May the river is crowded with shipping—huge iron and steel sailing craft that have been chartered beforehand, and carry off thousands of bags in their capacious holds; and a constant succession of "ditchers," as the steamers passing through the Suez Canal are called, which come "seeking," and seldom have to go away without their full complement of "five parts cargo rice," or "Europe milled." The steamers are displacing the sailing ships, and the shorter passage now makes it possible to carry fully husked rice home without the danger of heating, which was supposed to be avoided by the partly husked "five parts cargo rice." Harbour-masters and river-pilots have a busy time, and gather together many pieces of silver against the later months of the year, when they will have abundant leisure to spend them. Coringi coolies swarm in the town, and their monotonous chant, "Eh-ya-mah-la Tah-ma-lay, Madras Ag-boat Tah-ma-lay," may be heard at any hour of the night or the morning, floating over the river. The British sailor overflows into the town and sings noisy old salt sea-songs round about the Sule pagoda, gets mad drunk on arrack, and not unseldom clears Dalhousie Street with a linked-arm rush, heedless of the red-turbaned guardian of the peace, who keeps out of the way in the meantime, but will break poor drunken Jack's head with his truncheon if he finds him helpless and strayed from his fellow-roysterers.

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The Puzundaung Creek, where all the mills are, is as busy as an ant-hill all day long, and all night too, when some of the mills are lighted up with Jablochkoffs or later forms of electric light, and the silvery rays shine ghastly on the black and bronzed mill-workers. Here we have the Madrasi coolies again, making noises, according to their nature, as a kind of assertion that they are doing hard work. The lank Chittagonian firemen, with their aquiline noses, are coated with coal-dust, and divide their time between firing up and having a whiff at the hubble-bubble when Sandy,